

UNITED STATES INTERESTS IN SOUTH ASIA

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General Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

UNITED STATES INTERESTS IN SOUTH ASIA, by Anton Wijeyesekera, 92 pages.

Having been in the strategic wilderness for more than a decade, the South Asian region is again becoming an area of geopolitical rivalry among world powers and regional states. The region was also an area of rivalry between Soviet and US forces during the period of the Cold War. Yet many years after the end of the Cold War the region is once again becoming an arena for intense rivalry between states due to a variety of factors. Some of these imperatives are energy security, security of sea lanes, terrorism, piracy and superpower ambitions of some of the rising states.

The protection of these vital resources and reduction of conflict in this ocean should be a top priority of the hegemonic powers in the region. In this backdrop, the US as the sole super power of the world has an obligation to police this vital area for the betterment of the whole world. One effective way of tackling this situation is the setting up of a naval base in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

An ideal location for this purpose is Sri Lanka which is strategically located in the Indian Ocean close to the major sea lanes running from the Persian Gulf to South East Asia. Therefore the purpose of this study is to analyze the five factors; geography, security, infrastructure, society and geopolitical relations of Sri Lanka to find out whether it is mutually advantageous for the US and Sri Lanka to establish a US military base in Sri Lanka.

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ACRONYMS

CDMA	Code Division Multiple Access
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
GSM	Global System Mobile
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

During the Cold War, both United States (US) and Russia exerted political ideology and military might to gain the support of the nations of the Indian Ocean region in order to gain supremacy in this littoral. This was due to the great importance of the Indian Ocean through which runs more than three quarters of the world's trade. As of late both China and India are rising as potential superpowers and are making all efforts to gain control of the Indian Ocean.¹

India, because of its Indian Ocean littoral, seeks greater maritime presence in the region. China, as a Pacific Ocean Nation is increasingly interested in gaining a foothold in the Indian Ocean in its quest for global power. It has started funding its “Chain of Pearls” port facilities in southern Sri Lanka and Pakistan which is viewed as a possible first step in gaining control of the region.²

In this context, the US, the sole superpower in the world is making diplomatic efforts to balance China and India's strategic interests whilst maintaining good relations with Sri Lanka. For the US, South Asia is becoming increasingly important due to the shifting of the focus on Overseas Contingency Operations from Iraq to Afghanistan. With the developing relationship with India based on common concerns about international

¹Proquest, “US Experts on India and South Asia,” *US Newswire*, September 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com> (accessed 10 April 2009).

²Peter Symonds, “U.S, China and the War in Sri Lanka,” <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/march2009,pers-m 24.shtml> (accessed 8 May 2009).

terrorism, religious extremism, and the rise of China as well as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the two nations have embarked upon a broad program of cooperation to set the stage for a long term strategic partnership in the region.

India with its growing economy and powerful military position has become a global partner for the US and is shaping the future of Asia. There is a convergence of interests between India and the US on the issues vital to the two countries in the global arena.³ The naval power of India has made it one of the primary naval forces of the Indian Ocean,⁴ and it is now working with the US to maintain the security of the sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean. One of the major issues in protecting the sea lanes in the future is the harboring of large naval vessels and the security of such valuable weapon systems, which are lucrative targets to terrorists.

A close examination of the littorals of the region gives a prominent place to Sri Lanka as far as harboring and maritime security is concerned. This position is enhanced by the recent defeat of the dreaded Tamil Tigers in the long fought war by the Sri Lankan government. If there was any reason that excluded Sri Lanka from being a prominent partner in maritime security in the Indian Ocean, it was the conflict with the Tamil Tigers. The end of conflict makes Sri Lanka an ideal base to monitor the busy shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean.⁵ China by virtue of its material support to Sri Lanka during the

³Proquest, “US Experts on India and South Asia,” *US Newswire*, 22 September 2008, <http://proquest.umi.com> (accessed 10 April 2009).

⁴Ibid.

⁵P. VinojKumar, “The Dragons Newest Pearl,” *Tehelka Magazine* 6, no. 20, http://www.tehelka.com/story_main41.asp?filename=Ne230509the_dragon.asp (accessed 11 May 2009).

war has already shown signs of influence in Sri Lanka which India views as a possible threat to its interests. If India is threatened by the situation in its backyard, it could adversely affect the US interests in the region. Less concern on Sri Lanka by the US and India will present an advantageous position to China. Sri Lanka's main concern at this moment is the reconstruction and development of its economic and social structure. Sri Lanka would most certainly welcome the support of the international community for the process of reconstruction and development. This is where the importance of India, US and China matters the most. For China, a foothold in Sri Lanka will be of great importance to further its economic and security interests in the Indian Ocean.

The Chinese influence is of serious importance to both India and the US. Therefore, forging friendships with littoral nations of South Asia could be a potential deterrent to the Chinese influence. The US as a naval power considers the security of the Indian Ocean fundamental to its interests. South Asia, though regarded as marginally important to the United States in the past, holds a strategically important position in the geopolitical spectrum today.⁶ Some of the major reasons for this shift in importance are the rise of India and the influence of China in the region. The regional instability, the process of social, economic and political change and the shift in global power relationships have made it too costly for the US to ignore. Therefore, the US needs to maximize security in the region.

Another important interest of the US in South Asia is the socio-economic status of the nations in the region. A close look of the region shows that, with the exception of a

⁶Shivaji Ganguly, *US Policy Towards South Asia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 26.

few countries, all others are afflicted with one or more of the ailments of poverty, backwardness, fundamentalism, terrorism or internal insurgency. A number of territorial and maritime disputes remain alive. Confronted by this environment, States in the region believe that their security will be best guaranteed by gaining the support of the international community and the US believes that its relationship with India could enlarge India's security perimeter to achieve a position of greater influence in the region.⁷

The US has long worked closely with Sri Lanka to promote economic growth, opportunity and development. It is Sri Lanka's largest single export market, accounting for roughly 40 percent of the country's overseas sales.⁸ The presence of US intelligence bases in Sri Lanka for decades is an open secret. The central position of the island between Malacca and the Strait of Hormuz makes it an ideal communication centre which further gives reason for US interests in Sri Lanka; it has already carried out inspections in the Trincomalee harbor. For centuries Trincomalee harbor has been a central strategic point for many powers from the Portuguese, to the Dutch and British. The harbor has played a significant role in WWII.⁹ The importance of the Trincomalee harbor is such that Captain A.T. Mahan in his book "The influence of seapower in history 1660-1783" stated that it is an excellent and a defensible harbor that acquires first rate

⁷Donald L. Berlin, "India in the Indian Ocean," http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JIW/is_2_59/ai_n16689838/pg_2/?tag=content;col1,2006 (accessed 6 June 2009).

⁸United States Trade Representative, <http://www.ustr.gov/documentlibrary/pressreleases/2003/October/deputy/USTR> (accessed 21 July 2009).

⁹Wordpress.com, Farzana Shah, Sri Lanka and Struggle for the Control of the Indian Ocean, <http://pakalert.wordpress.com,2009> (accessed 17 May 2009).

strategic importance. Therefore, in the bigger game for the power in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka will be of great geo-political importance.

This work therefore is not an attempt to establish a theory on the power politics of these powerful nations. Rather this work will emphasize the complexities and ambiguities involved in this fluid struggle between key players of the region and how Sri Lanka as an island nation could be an important player in the equation in gaining a country's strategic advantage. Thus the study will address three important areas to drive the argument; the strategic importance of controlling the Indian Ocean, major interests of the US in the South Asian region and importance of Sri Lanka in gaining the strategic advantage in the region. The military victory gained over the Tamil Tigers, will certainly boost the chances of Sri Lanka becoming an economic hub in South Asia.

Primary Research Question

The primary research question for this research is: Would it be mutually advantageous for Sri Lanka and the US to establish a military base in Sri Lanka to counterbalance the Chinese influence in the region?

Secondary Research Questions

The following secondary questions will be answered in the cause of answering the primary question:

- a. What is the strategic importance of controlling the Indian Ocean?
- b. What are the major interests of the US in the South Asian region?
- c. Why is Sri Lanka important in gaining the strategic advantage in the region?

Significance

The significance of this study is threefold. The first lies in the changes that are expected to take place in the world order. As the power rivalry between China and the US intensifies, it is important to find out how the states of South Asia respond to the changing strategic situation in the region. For the US the stability of the region is the key in protecting its interests. The US needs to ensure that the partnership with India grows while minimizing China's influence in the region.

The study is also significant with respect to the Global War on Terrorism. Facts will be analyzed to find out the possibility of having India and Pakistan as allies and the role of Sri Lanka in winning the Global War on Terrorism.

Finally the study will determine how well Sri Lanka is responding to the diplomatic skirmishing between the USA, China and India. As a state that relies heavily on international support, Sri Lanka needs to understand the pros and cons of aligning with various states of the world.

Limitations

Though, countless number of books have been written on the subject of the importance of the Indian Ocean from time immemorial, no research has been done on the importance of Sri Lanka in balancing power. Therefore, the availability of research material and publications on the subject is the greatest limitation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sources on the Importance of the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world after Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. It lies South of Asia, between Africa and Australia with Antarctica in the South. Its total area, including the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea is about 28,400,000 square miles. “The Indian Ocean has 36 states around its littoral belt with a population of over two billion people. It also has 11 hinterland countries whose vital security and economic interests are dependent upon the Indian Ocean.”¹⁰ Most of the countries in the region are former colonies and many of them belong to the developing world. The Indian Ocean has some important seas in it namely, the Gulf of Aden and Oman, the Red Sea, The Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Carpenterie. It also has a large number of Islands which are strategically spread with good harbors and flat surfaces for airfields. Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra and Mauritius are some of the more important of them.

The Arabian Sea separates the peninsula of India and Africa. It is a very vital sea of the world in terms of commerce and political activities. It has two strategically important gulfs in it. The Persian Gulf is a protected landlocked sea; Strait of Homuz and Gulf of Oman command the entry to it. The availability and the development of oil resources have made this region extra important to the world. The Gulf of Aden ends at strait of Bab el Mandeb and controls entry into the Red Sea. The Gulf of Malacca in the

¹⁰Bhupinder Singh, “*The Indian Ocean and regional Security*” (Punjab: B.C. Publishers, 1984), 5.

Bay of Bengal controls the entry to the Indian Ocean from the East. The Indian Ocean provides major sea routes connecting the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. It carries a particularly heavy traffic of petroleum and petroleum products from the oilfields of the Persian Gulf and Indonesia. Its fish are of great and growing importance to the bordering countries for domestic consumption and export. Large reserves of hydrocarbons are being tapped in the offshore areas of Saudi Arabia, Iran, India, and Western Australia. An estimated 40 percent of the world's offshore oil production comes from the Indian Ocean. Beach sands rich in heavy minerals and offshore placer deposits are actively exploited by bordering countries, particularly India, South Africa, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The data provides a broad view on the expanse of the ocean and the importance of the Ocean for great powers of the world. The CIA's "*World Fact-book*" and Lt Col Bhupinder Singh's book on *Indian Ocean and Regional Security* give valuable facts about the large expanse of the Indian Ocean and its importance in the current context of world affairs.

The Indian Ocean has an exceptionally important economic, political and strategic significance for the whole world. It is considered as a hub of natural resources and is rich in several important minerals, raw material and marine food. "The region accounts for 80 per cent of world extraction of gold, 52 percent of tin, 28 percent manganese, 25 percent of nickel, 18 percent bauxite, 12 percent zinc and 77 percent of natural rubber production in the world."¹¹ The importance of the Ocean is tremendously enhanced by the presence of large reserves of oil and gas in its coasts. More than half of the world's oil and gas deposits are said to be located in this region. A plentiful supply of marine resources is

¹¹Ibid., 6.

also available in the waters of the region. Most industrial nations which are big powers in the world are interested in the exploration and exploitation of these resources.

The Ocean is also important in navigation and marine trade. Almost one fourth of the entire cargo in the world marine trade and two thirds of world oil are loaded and unloaded in the ports of this region. This is because of the commercial sea lanes that lie across the Indian Ocean. The sea lanes are the connecting link between Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The routes passing through it connect Europe and East Africa with South and South East Asia. Therefore, almost all the powerful states in the world are concerned with controlling these sea lanes which are crucial to the protection of their interests. This is why major powers like the US and China are trying to expand their influence in the region, for no other powers in the world does the sea transit through this region play an important role as the US and China.

Study of maritime history reveals that India was the first country to have dominated the Indian Ocean until the arrival of great powers starting with the Portuguese. The Portuguese conquered the Indian Ocean and controlled all its maritime routes to dominate the maritime and economic activities of the region. The Dutch, French and the English followed the Portuguese into the Indian Ocean. Such was the significance of the Indian Ocean; that the British controlled it until the end of the Second World War for its economic and strategic gains. During the Cold War the Soviet Union considered the Indian Ocean sea lanes as extremely important waterways to further its political military and ideological interests.¹² However, since the end of the cold war the US has been the

¹²William L. Dowdy and Russell B. Trood, *The Indian Ocean; Perspectives on a Strategic Arena* (UK: Duke University Press, 1985), 458.

dominant power in the region with no other nation to challenge its dominance in the Indian Ocean.

But, emerging states like China and India are determined to gain the dominance of the region for the maintenance of their economic political and military interests. And yet, as the pirate activity off the coast of Somalia, the intense terrorist activities taking place in the region and the desires of emerging states suggest, the Indian Ocean, the world's third-largest body of water, already forms center stage for the challenges of the twenty-first century.”¹³

In the present context, the Indian Ocean region is important because of numerous reasons. One obvious reason is its economic potential and trading routes. Other important facts are the presence of a number of nuclear powered states and a number of states with nuclear ambitions. The region is also home to some of world's most volatile failed and failing states. Terrorism, poaching and piracy are also grave issues of concern in the region. Table 1 depicts the amount of oil transported to South East Asia from the Middle East.

¹³Robert D Kaplan, “Power plays in the Indian Ocean,” *Foreign Affairs* (April 2009): 2, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com> (accessed 20 July 2009).

Table 1: Transportation of Oil in the Indian Ocean(Gallons).

YEAR	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
ASIA AND PACIFIC	17,836.2	18,802.7	19,405.9	19,415.0	20,150.5	20,702.0	21,888.1	22,104.9	22,522.3
AUSTRALIA	786.6	795.5	818.9	813.4	803.9	825.1	827.2	849.4	850.3
CHINA	3,607.3	3,968.4	4,442.2	4,445.0	4,791.3	5,271.2	6,179.7	6,314.5	6,727.2
INDIA	1,834.5	2,013.3	2,116.7	2,206.8	2,288.8	2,373.5	2,510.1	2,524.8	2,593.5
INDONESIA	888.2	931.7	996.4	1,026.0	1,075.4	1,112.9	1,143.7	1,139.9	1,124.3
JAPAN	5,419.1	5,530.1	5,409.6	5,234.4	5,344.8	5,279.9	5,215.0	5,173.1	5,030.7
NEW ZEALAND	108.9	111.3	115.6	114.7	121.7	126.9	130.6	131.2	129.5
SOUTH KOREA	1,911.9	2,068.7	2,127.1	2,121.7	2,164.9	2,172.0	2,151.2	2,090.6	2,074.4
THAILAND	625.1	631.2	617.3	604.4	641.1	685.8	751.4	761.7	757.0
OTHERS	2,654.5	2,752.5	2,762.1	2,848.6	2,918.5	2,854.8	2,979.2	3,119.6	3,235.4
TOTAL WORLD	69,812.7	70,890.2	71,518.0	72,187.1	72,673.8	73,989.7	76,471.3	77,116.7	78,020.4

Source: OPEC Library, World Imports of refined products by Country, <http://www.opec.org/library/Annual%20Statistical%20Bulletin/interactive/2007/FileZ/Main-Dateien/Section2.html> (accessed 13 August 2009).

James R. Holmes in his article on “*China and United States in the Indian Ocean*,” argues that the “Indian Ocean has assumed greater prominence in the world stage and unfortunately, much of the recent activities like financing and development of harbors and close diplomatic relations with littoral states by China has focused on future Chinese naval ambitions in the Indian Ocean and on potential US responses to such a new presence. But such a narrow analytical approach assumes that the region will remain an inanimate object perpetually vulnerable to outside manipulation. More importantly, it overlooks the possible interactions arising from the intervention of India, the dominant regional power. Indeed, omitting the potential role that India might play in any capacity

would risk misreading the future of the Indian Ocean region.”¹⁴ Due to the vastness of the Ocean, the economic and military activities that are taking place in the Indian Ocean are complex in nature. The involvement of major powers of the world in trade and security matters in the Indian Ocean and its littoral states makes the situation in the region increasingly complex. The focus of the world in this context is beamed on to the three powers India, China and the US.

The entrance of China to the maritime domain in the Indian Ocean is a key event that has increased the complexity of the situation. China’s enormous economic boom, coupled with superpower ambitions, has perplexed the United States and India partnership. The Centre for Advanced Defense Studies, in its *Defense Concepts Series*, points out the complex relationship between China and India and its implications to the US. The document argues that the US can protect its interests in the region only through a balance of forces between India and China.¹⁵

The book on *Gauging US-Indian Strategic Cooperation* by the Strategic Studies Institute is focused on the success of the US- Indian strategic cooperation. It discusses a volume of details that would affect the success of the strategy. Various other issues pertaining to the Indian Ocean and South Asian region are discussed by different authors in the book. Information given in the book on the US-Indian relations and the future of the Indian Ocean is important in analyzing the strategic setting of the region.

¹⁴James R. Holmes, “China and the United States in the Indian Ocean,” *Naval War College Review* (July 2008), <http://www.accessmylibrary.com> (accessed 13 July 2009).

¹⁵Centre for Advanced Defense Studies, “US Strategy with China and India: Striking a Balance to Avoid Conflict,” *Defense Concepts Series* (August 2006), http://www.c4ads.org/defense_concepts_series (accessed 28 October 2009).

Nazeri Khalids of the Maritime Institute of Malaysia, argues that, as the importance of maritime trade and strategic interests increase, the Indian Ocean will continue to be at the forefront of attention of trading nations and the world's great powers. This will exert plenty of challenges to this ocean in areas such as navigational safety, environmental integrity, sovereignty and security, and enhance focus on the impacts they will have on social, trade and economic development in the region. Barring drastic developments, the near future will undoubtedly see an increase in maritime activities in the Indian Ocean waters, fuelled by factors such as increasing international trade amongst nations, demographic changes, integration of economies, modernization in ports and shipping, increasing dependence of economic powers on energy supply, and growing strategic interests. Subsequently, the scenario in the Indian Ocean will become more complex and the challenges greater than ever.¹⁶

Based on the literature gathered on the importance of the Indian Ocean, it could be seen that the Indian Ocean is strategically extremely important for all trading nations in the world. Its economic and strategic importance compels major regional and global powers to protect their economic lines of communications in order to further their national interests. The most critically important prerequisite in protecting these interests would be the possession of a powerful navy. However, one great challenge for most nations in protecting such a vast expanse of water is the basing and maintenance of their naval resources. Littoral states of the Indian Ocean, specially the states in the South Asian region could become the key terrain for world navies in this respect.

¹⁶Nazeri Khalid, "Role of Indian Ocean in Facilitating Global maritime Trade," Maritime Institute, Kualar Lampur http://www.tamilnation.org/intframe/indian_ocean/050628indian_ocean.pdf (accessed 13 July 2009).

United States and South Asia

Having understood the importance of the Indian Ocean, now the study will focus on the relationship between the United States and South Asia. South Asia consists of seven very diverse sovereign states of different sizes. It is the vast geographical space stretching from the Himalayan mountain ranges in the North to the Indian Ocean to the South and from the valley of the Indus in the west to the plains of the Brahmaputra River in the East.¹⁷ South Asia consists of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives. One fifth of the world population lives in South Asia. Today South Asia is strategically an important part of the world which has significant implications for the international system. Being a part of the Indian Ocean littoral, South Asia's significance has grown due to few important reasons. The continuing crisis in Kashmir between Pakistan and India, the testing of nuclear devices by Pakistan and India in 1998, and the presence of such a vast population in the region are some of them. South Asia has also been one of the regions in the world with some of the most intractable conflicts in the world during the past half a century.

Shivaji Ganguly's book on *US Policy towards South Asia* brings out valuable details pertaining to the history of US involvement in South Asia and the interests of the United States in the Indian Ocean region. He claims the US initially did not see South Asia as an area of strategic importance. He believes US involvement in the region grew as a result of the political and military and ideological competition with the Soviet

¹⁷ Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia* (London: Routelge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), 3.

Union.¹⁸ According to Ganguly, US perceptions on South Asia can be derived from US policy statements regarding the region and trends in America's regional relations.¹⁹ Though the US viewed South Asia as an area of marginal strategic importance due to regional instability and the process of social, economic and political change, the shifts in global power relationships has made South Asia an important region not to ignore. The US involvement in the region has reached its zenith in the past few years. The situation after 11 September 2001 and US-Indian strategic cooperation has changed the relationship pattern between US and South Asia. Present involvement of the US in Afghanistan and Pakistan, US-Indian strategic partnership and the growing presence of Chinese influence in the region has increased the importance of South Asia more than ever before.

The article on “*US Security Policy toward South Asia after September 11th and Its Implications for China*,” by Zhang Guihong and Ralph A. Cossa, Brad Glosserman, Michael A. McDevitt, Nirav Patel, James Przystup, Brad Roberts in their book on *United States and Asia Pacific Region* illustrates key points that have changed the South Asian region during the last ten years. They explain the dimensions of the US-South Asia relations. The relations between US and the region grew due to various external factors such as the demise of the Soviet Union as a great power, India's economic growth, the

¹⁸Shivaji Ganguly, 27.

¹⁹Ibid.

growing Indian-American community in the US, the increasing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and the emergence of China as a influential power in the region.²⁰

As the US interests in South Asia become more Indian centric, stability in the South Asian region is a key concern for the US, and India plays the most important role in maintaining the peace and stability of the region.²¹ India is also the centre of conflicts such as territorial disputes with Pakistan over Kashmir. It also has growing problems in the form of nationalism in states like Tamil Nadu, Nagaland and the Maoist struggle in the Naxal belt. The political problems in India are complicated. The regime continuously changes hands and the governments fail to bring about effective social and economic reforms, which will likely worsen the present problems.²² All these factors will influence the instability of the region as a whole. India's relationship with Pakistan is also one of the biggest threats to the region, especially as both countries have nuclear weapons in their arsenal. Problems in other countries in the region is also posing other daunting problems for the US and India. Therefore, the situation in the region remains unstable in all aspects.

According to Dr. Ashley J.Tellis, the United States today stands at an extraordinary moment of opportunity, because for the first time in many decades, it enjoys good relations with India and Pakistan simultaneously. As of today, the US is

²⁰Zhang Guihong, "U.S. Security Policy towards South Asia after September 11th and its Implications to China," *Zhejiang University*, 2003, <http://www.stimson.org>, (accessed 10 August 2009).

²¹Centre for Advanced Defense Studies, 1.

²²Henry Sokolski, *Negotiating the Obstacles for US-Indian Strategic Cooperation*, in *Gauging US-Indian Strategic Cooperation* (Cleveland: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 5.

heavily involved in Overseas Contingency Operations to wipe out the Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Swati Parashar of the South Asian Analysis Group says that, US led anti terrorist operations cannot exclude South Asia. Islamist jihad terrorism continues to be inspired by elements within Pakistan, Afghanistan and now even Bangladesh, which has emerged as the new hub of terrorism. With India and Bangladesh home to the second and the third largest Muslim population in the world, radicalization of Muslims from South Asia is unabated. Some of the world's dreaded terrorists are still hiding in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and the Taliban has waged a significant comeback, to disrupt the fragile peace in Afghanistan.²³ The contents of the article explain further the value of the region to the United States in terms of its present involvement and in terms of what could be expected in the future. As the commitments of the US continue to increase in the region, there is also a greater chance of increasing religious radicalization. On top of this there is the fact of other players like China, slowly creeping in to influence the political and economic dynamics of the region, making South Asia a region with global influence.

South Asia after the Cold War by Kanti P. Bajpai and Stephen P. Cohen, *Security and Security Building in the Indian Ocean Region* by Sandy Gordon and *The Indian Ocean* by Dieter Braun are some of the other products that illustrates the importance of South Asia in the World. Stephen P. Cohen, in another article on *South Asia and US*, argues that, Washington must come to a more refined understanding of China's role in South Asia. China is not only Pakistan's major military ally, it has become one of India's leading trading partners, and plays an important political role in Nepal, Bangladesh and

²³Swati Parashar, "The U.S and South Asia: From Tactical Security Relationship Towards a Strategic Partnership," 2006, <http://www.saag.org> (accessed 28 May 2009).

Sri Lanka, where a Chinese economic and cultural presence is welcomed as a way of balancing the dominant India. And, of course, for years scholars, diplomats and journalists have speculated about the eventual rivalry, or even war, between Asia's two giant states.²⁴

According to a Defense concepts series article, the relationship between China and India is complex, and the developing relationship between India and US therefore is of great concern to China.²⁵ China is the leading nation in the East Asian region and India is the leader in South Asia. However, China is trying to increase its leverage in South Asia due to the US support to India. This is where the smaller countries in the region come in to play. Though China is also concerned about good relations with India, it has maintained a much closer relationship with Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The Sino- Pak relationship is a worry to India because of the Kashmir issue. China is also maintaining close links with Sri Lanka and has become a staunch ally of Sri Lanka in the recent past. There is concern in the US and Indian circles about the growing influence of China in the region. This influence might slowly result in a shift of leadership role in the region if China emerges above India in the region.

Meanwhile, Subhash Kapila in an article on *United States Foreign Policy Predicament* says that, China presents a major concern to the US in the region. Giving equal status to both China and India in the region will be advantageous for the US as both China and India will compete for supremacy in an equal situation. Therefore, the US is

²⁴Stephen P. Cohen, "The US and South Asia," <http://www.brookings.edu> (accessed 8 May 2009).

²⁵Centre for Advanced Defense Studies, 2.

trying to maintain good relationships with both China and India in order to maintain balance of power. However, China is more powerful than India in military, strategic and economic aspects and the US is supporting India to be equal with Chinese power.²⁶

Paul H Kriesburg of the Woodrow Wilson Centre in his article on *South Asia and Indian Ocean* gives some valuable thoughts on the characteristics of the region, political military dynamics and relations with the US. He points out that, in the South Asian region of the Indian Ocean chances are good for a peaceful, stable system of regional relations, for the absence of a dominant hostile power, and for peacefully managing conflicts over the next ten to 15 years. India is unlikely to be expansionist, and New Delhi will not have the national interest or resources to threaten other naval powers in the Indian Ocean. There is minimal security cooperation among regional states, and little chance of much more before 2010.²⁷ The US as the primary power in the world has the capacity and responsibility to play an effective role in promoting the construction of security architecture for South Asia. It can assist the region by balancing the scope of its economic engagement with all South Asian countries, says Maliha Lodhi in her article on *Security Challenges in South Asia*. The most important imperative of post-Cold War South Asia is that the countries and peoples of the region have decided to join the global economy and act on the global stage. They are attempting to reform their economies from socialism to free markets and someday graduate from the developing to the developed world. They will accomplish these goals with or without American participation. It is in

²⁶Subash Kapila, *United States Foreign Policy Predicament*, 2006, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org> (accessed 7 May 2009).

²⁷Paul H Kriesburg, *United States and South Asia* (VA: Center for Naval Analysis, 2003), 10

America's best interest to act as a friend and partner to the countries of South Asia and participate with them in their transition.²⁸ The importance of South Asia as a strategic region also cannot be overlooked, because of the close strategic and economic ties between South East Asian nations and the US.

Based on the facts on the importance of the Indian Ocean and the US relationship with South Asia, it is clear that the Indian Ocean is one of the busiest in terms of maritime, political and military activities. US involvement in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India coupled with Chinese influence in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka could make the region a hub of politico-military activities in the international system. It is also clear that almost all seven countries in South Asia have deep rooted internal problems and economic and political turmoil of their own. However, Sri Lanka could be seen as a nation with a different strategic setting. Its location, population, culture and resources could be interwoven to make an atmosphere conducive to the international system. Therefore looking at the importance of Sri Lanka will be of value to all powerful nations.

Importance of Sri Lanka in the region

Sri Lanka's importance in the region is amply covered in the articles written by Dharmaratnam Sivaram, Ramesh Somasundaram, Geoffrey Lunstead and Bhupinder Singh. Sri Lanka with a size of 65,610 sq km is situated south of India in one of the most strategically important locations in the world. Known as Ceylon by the British, it is separated from India by the Palk Strait. Due to its long beaches and tropical climate it has attracted tourists from around the world since it gained independence from the British in

²⁸Dana R Dillon, *US Strategic Objectives in South Asia*, 2005, <http://www.heritage.org/research> (accessed 13 May 2009).

1948. Sri Lanka occupies a strategic point in the Indian Ocean, whose vast expanse covering 2,850,000 sq miles, touches the shores of the Indian subcontinent in the North; Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia in the East; Antarctica in the South; and East Africa in the West.”²⁹ Sri Lanka holds the position of being the naval gateway to the Indian subcontinent. It is in a position to play a very important part in any maritime movement between the West and the East. It also has some deep water harbors which could be used as potential bases for any kind of vessels. The strategic importance of the Sri Lankan harbors was recognized by all western powers that entered the race for the domination of the Indian Ocean. “Since the 17th century, it has attracted the Portuguese, Dutch, French, the British, and the Indians, in succession. According to Ramesh Somasundaram, there are three reasons for such interest: Sri Lanka is strategically situated, it is ideally situated to be a major communication center, and it has Trincomalee, described by the British Admiral Horatio Nelson as “the finest harbor in the world.”

But more importantly Sri Lanka is situated in close proximity to the one of the busiest and the most important sea lanes that run through the Indian Ocean. All the oil supplies to Southeast and East Asia that originate in the Middle East are shipped from ports in the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf. The sea-lanes from here converge in the Arabian Sea and then pass through the Gulf of Mannar and curve off the western, southern and southeastern coast of Sri Lanka.³⁰ Eighty percent of Japan's oil supplies and 60 percent of

²⁹P. K. Balachandran, “Sri Lanka’s Strategic Importance,” 2005, http://www.tamilnation.org/intframe/indian_ocean/050530_sri_lanka_strategic_importance.htm (accessed 10 May 2009).

³⁰Dharmaratnam Sivaram, “Geo- Strategic Implications of Sethusamudram,” *Daily Mirror, Sri Lanka*, October 2004.

China's oil supplies are shipped on this sea-lane. Almost half of the world's container traffic passes through the choke points of this sea-lane and its branches in the Indian Ocean. It is the security of this sea lane that is of great importance to the US and India. India is adamant about obtaining supreme control of the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. The architect of India's naval doctrine argued that India should recognize the significance of the Indian Ocean for the development of its commercial activities. He further went on to say that India never lost her independence till she lost the command of the sea in the first decade of the 16th century.³¹ India had plans to station a fleet in the Trincomalee harbor in eastern Sri Lanka to guard the entrance to the Indian Ocean from the East.

The importance of the British bases in Sri Lanka was such that the British continued to use them under a defense treaty after independence. These two bases Trincomalee in the eastern coast and Katunayake in the western coast played a pivotal role for the allied forces in the war against Japan. Since then Sri Lanka maintained a non aligned stance during the Cold war and declared that it would not provide base facilities at its air and sea ports to any big power. The above statements illustrate the importance of the Indian Ocean and Sri Lanka in the South Asian region. India's losing of command in the harbors of Sri Lanka would certainly put China in control of the strategic sea lanes in Southern and eastern Sri Lanka. That will certainly alarm the US, which is helping India to gain equal status with China.³²

The United States enjoys cordial relations with Sri Lanka that are based, in large part, on shared democratic traditions. The US policy toward Sri Lanka is characterized by

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

respect for its independence, sovereignty, and moderate nonaligned foreign policy; support for the country's unity, territorial integrity, and democratic institutions; and encouragement of its social and economic development. The US has assisted Sri Lanka to uplift its economic, political stature and offered limited military assistance since Sri Lanka's independence in 1948.³³ For the first time since independence Sri Lanka accorded permission to US naval forces to use the harbor at Trincomalee for rest and recuperation and there was widespread rumor that Trincomalee might be a US naval base. However, since 1983, Sri Lanka's importance in terms of a valuable base diminished due to the security situation that prevailed in the country.

Geoffrey Lunstead, former US Ambassador to Sri Lanka in his supplementary study to the Sri Lanka Strategic Conflict Assessment on the United States' Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process 2002-2006, categorically denies the fact that the US has any strategic interests in Sri Lanka. This was basically due to the threat posed by the Tamil Tigers and the conflict in the North and East of Sri Lanka. But according to Robert D. Kaplan, the prospect of ethnic warfare has scared away US admirals from considering a base in Sri Lanka, which is strategically located at the confluence of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. The Chinese are constructing a refueling station for their warships there. All preceding illustrations provide evidence for the importance of Sri Lanka as an Indian Ocean littoral state and as an important partner in regional politics.

However, the truth is that Sri Lanka holds a trump in terms of its location and could be one of the best bases for any power who wishes to dominate the Indian Ocean in

³³US Department of State, *Background Note: Sri Lanka*, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5249.htm> (accessed 12 August 2009).

the 21st century. The Asia-Pacific region is becoming a major consumer of the world's oil resources, with China becoming a growing importer of oil and natural gas. By 2020, oil consumption in this region will reach 38 million barrels per day, with 80 percent of that oil coming from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean. While India now imports around 80 million tons of oil annually, the annual demand for imported oil will grow to an estimated 150 million tons in 2020. Today, some 50 oil tankers traverse Indian shores daily; by 2020, the number is expected to be between 150 and 200.³⁴

The presence of extra regional powers in the Indian Ocean will certainly necessitate big powers to maintain their supremacy there. A naval base in the centre of the Indian Ocean which can provide easy access to East and West would be a need for any desired power. Sri Lanka with its renewed internal security situation couples with excellent ports could certainly play an important role in this respect.

Military Bases and Naval Fleets

Robert E. Harkarvy's books; *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases* and *Bases Abroad*, clearly illustrates various aspects of power rivalry over foreign basing facilities and why access is sought only in particular places beyond geography. He explains that this is basically due to three distinct criteria: location, characteristics of the ports and political disposition of the host nation.³⁵ C. T. Sanders' book on *America's Overseas Garrisons* and Anita P. Bakers book on *US Soldiers Overseas*, explains the

³⁴Ramtanu Maitra, "India-US relations; All at Sea in the Indian Ocean," *Asia Times*, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/FA22Df03.html (accessed 18 August 2009).

³⁵Robert E. Harkarvy, *Bases Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 34.

issues and consequences of establishing overseas military bases. In order to determine the size and nature of the base envisaged in the Sri Lanka, details of US Navy 5th fleet which is responsible for naval operations in the Indian Ocean and its Combined Task Forces will be scrutinized in the web sites.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses the case study analysis methodology. Qualitative data gathered through newspapers, magazines, books, websites, memos, transcripts of conversations and annual reports, will be used to build the case.³⁶ As shown on the literature review, the information gathered through existing sources has been divided into three main areas based on the three secondary questions. Information gathered on these three questions will be analyzed to answer the primary research question.

Method of Data Collection

Initially, data is collected through existing documentary sources and used to describe the geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean in terms of economic activity, natural resources, and political and military activity. Data on the interests and involvement of world powers in the region will also be gathered to find out the importance of the region to them. Then, information on the relationship between the US and South Asia is assessed to show the importance of South Asia as a region in the Indian Ocean and why it is important for the US in military, economic and political terms. The influence of India and China in the region is also analyzed to determine the complexity of the relationship between the three powers in the region. Finally, information on the location, geography, history and strategic importance of Sri Lanka is addressed to answer the third secondary research question. Details on the relationship between Sri Lanka and

³⁶Language Centre, Asian Institute of Technology, “Writing up Research Method and Research Design,” <http://www.languages.ait.ac.th/el21meth.htm>, (accessed 10 May 2009).

US and the mutual interests of the two countries are then examined to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between the two countries.

Method of Data Analysis

In order to answer the three secondary questions, information will be gathered fitting five basic assessment criteria; Geography, Security, Infrastructure, Society and Geopolitical Relations. The situation in Sri Lanka with regard to the above criteria will be analyzed to find out why Sri Lanka is more suitable than other nations to become a naval base in the region.

The first criteria used for the analysis is Geography. According to Robert E. Harkarvy, geography becomes the most important factor in selecting the location for a military base. In respect to the location, the distances and time from the bases to troubled spots or sites of confrontation, strategic value of the location and availability of facilities like air fields takes precedence.³⁷ Geography influences the distances, power to control territory and shaping the foreign policies and international relations of nations. And according to great naval strategist Mahan, the value of geographic location is three fold; its position, strength and resources. Where all three conditions are found in one location it becomes a place of great strategic importance.³⁸ Clausewitz himself noted that “geography and character of the ground bear a close and ever present relation to

³⁷Harkarvy, *Bases Abroad*, 26.

³⁸Allan Westcott, *Mahan on Naval Warfare* (Boston: Little Brown and Company Press, 1918), 70.

strategy.”³⁹ South Asian countries have always attracted foreign powers specifically due to its geography besides its wealth and resources.⁴⁰ Therefore the geographic features of Sri Lanka within the region will be analyzed to determine its potential as a base.

The second criteria; security would be the most important factor as far as the US is concerned. When closely examined it could be seen that the countries of the South Asian region remain mired in a vicious cycle of poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment. These countries also stand low in the human development indicator rankings of the world. Economic deprivation, illiteracy and unemployment provide a fertile ground for intolerance and extremism which in turn promotes conflict and violence.⁴¹ These are all signs of threats to security and the major concern of any powerful nation considering basing facilities would be the security of its forces. As Shuja Nawaz states, “the security environment of the modern era is dominated by weak states and non state actors and importance of prevailing in today’s conflict is essential to having a future.”⁴² According to the US National Defence Strategy, “Defending the Homeland, Winning the Long War, Promoting security, deterring conflict and winning the nations’ wars are the main objectives.

³⁹Hew Strachan and Andreas Herburg Rothe, *Clausewitz in the 21st Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 243.

⁴⁰Zia Mian, “Pushing South Asia Toward the Brink,” July 2009, <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/6295> (accessed 13 August 2009).

⁴¹Colombia University Library, “Government and Politics in South Asia,” South and South East Asian Studies, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/southasia/cuwl/govt.html> (accessed 11 July 2009).

⁴²Shuja Nawaz, “New Strategies in Pakistan and Afghanistan,” <http://www.acus.org/tags/international-security9> (accessed 23 July 2009).

The best way to achieve security is to prevent war when possible and to encourage peaceful change within the international system and building capacities of a broad spectrum of partners as the basis for long term security.”⁴³ Therefore the security situation of Sri Lanka will be analyzed in comparison to the other countries in the region to find out if the above objectives could be met by basing in Sri Lanka.

Third criteria used for the evaluation is the availability of infrastructure in Sri Lanka. Infrastructure is a key factor in responding to the current global economic downturn, and in the drive to increase economic growth, reduce poverty, and achieve development goals. As per Harkarvy there is a mix of variables that determines the worth of a base facility. They are; size, nature of the ports, shelter afforded, anchorage depth, repair capabilities, dry docking, supplies and services.⁴⁴ President George Bush in 2004 stated that the infrastructure of the present day bases were developed to defend against a largely static enemy and they demand flexibility in order to promote adaptability in a world of diverse and unpredictable interests. Availability of infrastructure in Sri Lanka will be analyzed against the above variables to find out the suitability of Sri Lanka as a base to face the emerging challenges of the 21st century.

The society of Sri Lanka would be the next evaluation criteria used in the analysis. Sri Lanka is a country rich with a unique culture based on Buddhist religious values. The impact of the religion and culture will be an enormous factor in considering the establishment of a western culture oriented military base in any of the countries in the

⁴³US National Defence Strategy, 2008, <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=us+ national+security +strategy+2008&aq=5&oq=US+national+security&aqi=g10> (accessed 10 August 2009).

⁴⁴Robert E. Harkarvy, *Bases Abroad*, 39.

South Asian region.⁴⁵ The presence of a US military base would inevitably have a lot of negative impact on the Sri Lankan Culture. While some foreign governments like the US bases for their perceived economic benefits, many locals living near the bases suffer environmental and health damage from military toxins and pollution, disrupted economic, social, and cultural systems, military accidents, and increased prostitution and crime.⁴⁶ There have been many unlawful incidents involving US military personnel in various countries during the past. Therefore the impact of the presence of a military base in terms of social, political, environmental and psychological effects on the people will be analyzed under this criterion.

Finally, the Geo-political relations of Sri Lanka will be analyzed to find out the impact of diplomatic relations in establishing a military base in Sri Lanka. This is one of the most important aspects of the study as the characteristics of a country's neighbors are of great importance. Different geographic neighborhoods have unique histories and face very different issues. However, which neighborhood is violent and which is not can change radically overtime.⁴⁷ South Asia has always been a troubled neighborhood and India's determination to be an international power has strongly influenced the geo-political environment of the region and India has always seen the entire subcontinent as

⁴⁵Kanti P.Bajpai, *South Asia After the Cold War* (New York: Westview Press, 1993), 47.

⁴⁶David Vine, "Too many Overseas Bases," <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/5903> (accessed 13 June 2009).

⁴⁷C. Dale Walton, *Geopolitics and the Great Powers in the Twenty-first Century: Geopolitics in an uncertain World* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 14.

an Indian sphere of influence.⁴⁸ As such the global or regional basing facilities and other forms of military access constitute an important part of the geopolitical equation.⁴⁹ A military base in the middle of the Indian Ocean in Sri Lanka will certainly affect the foreign policy of Sri Lanka and its relations with some of its long time allies in the region as well as in the world. Therefore the complexities of geopolitical relations between Sri Lanka and its allies will be analyzed to find out how a US military base will influence Sri Lanka and the US in the global arena.

Once the analysis is completed based on the above criteria, conclusions and recommendations are made to find an answer to the primary research question.

⁴⁸South Asia: “Nuclear Geo-politics,” Institute of National Strategic Studies, <http://google.com> (accessed 8 May 2009).

⁴⁹Robert E. Harkavy, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases; The Geopolitics of Access Diplomacy* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 271.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Having explained the criteria used for the analysis, this chapter focuses on analyzing the suitability of Sri Lanka as a location for a US naval base in the South Asian region. The geography, security, infrastructure, society and geopolitical relations of Sri Lanka will be analyzed to verify the suitability of Sri Lanka as a US naval base in the Indian Ocean.



Figure1. Map of Indian Ocean Region

Source: P. K. Balachandran, Sri Lanka's Strategic Importance, 30 May 2005, http://www.tamilnation.org/intframe/indian_ocean/050530sri_lanka_strategic_importance.htm (accessed 12 April 2009).

Geography

As outlined in chapter three, geography is one of the most important factors in selecting a location for a military base, and as Harkarvy outlines in his book “*Great*

Power Competition for Overseas Bases” geography affects the distances, international relations and foreign policies of nations.

According to Ramesh Somasundaram of the Deakin University, geographically, Sri Lanka is a prime location situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it has access to the two most important gateways to the Indian Ocean; the Strait of Homuz and the Strait of Malacca. The distance from Sri Lanka to the Strait of Homuz and the Strait of Malacca is approximately 2,000 miles; this means Sri Lanka is located in the most central maritime route between the Persian Gulf and Indonesia.⁵¹ As illustrated by Dr. Dhupinder Singh, Sri Lanka is also situated between the two important bodies of water, the Bays of Bengal, which has some important South East Asian nations along its littoral and the Arabian Sea which hugs the littorals of the oil rich Persian Gulf.⁵² As seen by the events that unfolded since the end of the Second World War, mobility and logistic support that an overseas military base can provide has been viewed by great powers as one of the most important aspects of their National Security Strategies. As illustrated by Larry W. Bowman and Jeffrey A. Lefebvre, allied wartime strategy highlighted the importance of maintaining bases in North Africa in order to support logistics and military

⁵⁰P. K. Balachandran, “Sri Lanka’s Strategic Location,” http://www.tamilnation.org/intframe/indian_ocean/050530sri_lanka_strategic_importance.htm (accessed 12 April 2009).

⁵¹Dupinder Singh, *Indian Ocean and Regional Security* (India: B.C. Publications, 1994), 84-85.

⁵²Ibid., 86.

operations in Europe.⁵³ The same theory could be applied to the operational environment that is prevalent in the Indian Ocean region.

According to P. C. Vinoj Kumar of Tehelka Magazine, in terms of distances and measurement of time it is worth noting that Sri Lanka is the most central location to reach troubled spots and sites of conflict in the Indian Ocean region.⁵⁴ It can readily support operations in the Middle East, Afghanistan or South East Asia. Location has always been the determining factor in selecting a base since ancient times. Sri Lanka has always been one of those locations that attracted the dominant sea power of any given era. This was mainly because of her geographic location in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and the quality of the harbors available in Sri Lanka.

As Ramesh Somasundaram of the Deakin University explained in his analysis, Sri Lanka is a great communication center in the Indian Ocean., which is why the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in South Asia chose it to locate his headquarters during World War II.⁵⁵

Sri Lanka is becoming even more important in the political map of the world. The northern part of the Indian Ocean, which tends to resemble a bay, is surrounded by Africa, Asia and Australia. Its significance is further enhanced by the fact that it offers a very good line of communication between the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This

⁵³ Larry W. Bowman and Jeffrey Lefebvre, *The Indian Ocean: US Military and Strategic*, " in *The Indian Ocean; Perspectives in a strategic Arena*, ed. William L.Dowdy and Russel B. Trood (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 415.

⁵⁴ P. K. Vinoj Kumar, "Winning a war Without Witness," http://www.tehelka.com/story_main40.asp?filename=Ne222108the_liberators.asp (accessed 21 September 2009).

⁵⁵ Balachandran.

has increased in importance as various gateways were opened through the Suez to the Red Sea, the Bab-Al-Mandeb Strait, to the Malacca and the Indonesian Islands.⁵⁶ Further, the entrance to the Persian Gulf has augmented the strategic value of Sri Lanka in terms of commerce and international shipping routes.

Table 2. Ports Available in Sri Lanka		
PORT	REMARK	MAX DRAFT
China Bay	Sub Port	
Cod Bay	Sub Port	
Colombo	Open Port	14
Galle	Sub Port	9.1
Jaffna	Sub Port	
Kankesanturai	Sub Port	8.2
Trincomalee	Open Port	13

Source: National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, World Port Index, http://pollux.nss.nima.mil/pubs/pubs_j_wpi_sections.html (accessed 18 August 2009).

Geographically, Sri Lanka is also unique because of the quality of the ports available along the Island. The above chart gives a general idea of all the ports available in Sri Lanka. Out of this, Trincomalee and Colombo are two of the best ports available in the whole region in terms of economic and military strategic perspectives. Trincomalee is rated as one of the best natural ports in the world due to its location and extraordinary depth in the inner harbor. According to Somasundaram, Trincomalee is at a strategic point in the whole region, having global significance in the modern age, it is placed in a

⁵⁶Harkarvy, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases*, 7-8.

strategic point near the Bay of Bengal in the Eastern Coast of Sri Lanka.⁵⁷ The entrance to the harbor is four miles wide and five miles across, East to West. The inner harbor covers about 12 square miles and is secured by outcrops of huge rocks and small islets. A fleet, so protected, could easily dominate the Bay of Bengal and the whole of Indian Ocean sea lanes.⁵⁸ Therefore, any power that controls Trincomalee will have a great advantage from a naval and strategic perspective.⁵⁹ Trincomalee as a naval base enabled the Portuguese, Dutch and the English to control their colonial empires effectively. It also allowed them to dominate their trade routes across the Indian Ocean. The British found it valuable after they lost Singapore naval base to the Japanese in 1942.

In the present world where time and distances are of great importance as far as naval movements are concerned, Sri Lanka's location could be seen as the pivot point in the Indian Ocean. As Harkarvy notes in his book "*Bases Abroad*," space and distance measurement are two important facts considered when locating a naval base. The distance from the base concerned, to existing military bases and probable conflict zones could be an indispensable requirement in the present context. During the inter-war period considerable attention was paid to steaming times in connection with the Panama and Suez Canal choke points.⁶⁰ In the recent years the Persian Gulf area, Indonesian archipelago, Straits of Homuz and Malacca, are all becoming important for the international system of trade and security. The possible existence of a naval base in Sri

⁵⁷Balachandran.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Harkarvy, *Bases Abroad*, 34.

Lanka could certainly allow the access to all the above important places within days of an incident that is detrimental to the interests of the international system. Table 3 illustrates the approximate distances of projecting naval power to some of the important ports in the east and western littorals of the Indian Ocean.

Table 3. Maritime Distances from Sri Lanka to Important Indian Ocean Ports		
Port	Approximate Distance From Sri Lanka (NM)	Time/Number of Days Taken (Speed 20 NM)
Indonesia	1800	4
Singapore	1500	3
Djibuti	2200	4.5
Aden	2000	4.3
Mombasa	2500	5.2
Durban	3600	7.5
Karachchi	1300	2.8
Perth	3100	6.5

Source: Created by Author.

These factors become extremely important when it comes to deployment of forces from one place to another. In times of alert, a naval force deployed in Sri Lanka could rapidly reinforce a variety of contingencies. According to Harkarvy, at no time were geographical problems more pressing than during 1980 crisis in Iran and Afghanistan. Naval assets were shifted from the western Pacific to the Indian Ocean.⁶¹ A base in the middle of the Indian Ocean in Sri Lanka could possibly overcome such difficulties in terms of time and distance. When considering the littoral of the Indian Ocean it is also seen that some of the most dangerous flash points in the world are situated in this area.

⁶¹Ibid., 36.

Therefore, as noted in the above table, reaction to any of the places in the eastern or the western littoral of the Indian Ocean will not take more than a week to reach. The presence of a naval force in this area would also prevent the necessity of shifting assets from other areas as done during the Gulf war of 1991 and during the Iran and Afghanistan crises of 1980.⁶²

From a geostrategic point of view, Sri Lanka's geographic location has been its greatest treasure. According to Stephen Cohen, "geostrategic" means the importance of a country or a region by virtue of its geographical location.⁶³ She could be considered as a hub of economic and naval strategic activity between the resource rich western and eastern Asia. During a period of crisis in the Indian Ocean region, according to Donald L. Berlin, Sri Lanka is an ideal base to protect the trade routes and resources that nourish the world economy.⁶⁴ Sri Lanka would also be an ideal place for a naval base, especially for the US, if she intends to contain China, Iran, and terrorism in Afghanistan whilst also gaining economically from India's economic growth. Further, as far as the climatic conditions are concerned, Sri Lanka does not have extreme winters or temperate conditions. However, the uniqueness of this Island is that the size of the Island allows people to move from a temperate high humid area to a cool climate within a matter of few hours.

⁶²Ibid., 37.

⁶³Stephen Cohen, "Geostrategic Importance of Pakistan," <http://www.cssforum.com.pk/css-compulsory-subjects/essay/essays/8432-geo-strategic-importance-pakistan.html> (accessed 2 October 2009).

⁶⁴Donald L. Berlin, "Neglected no Longer; Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean," http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/87417013_3.html (accessed 26 July 2009).

The importance of the geographic location of Sri Lanka could further be understood by comparing her to some of the other nations in the region. Geographically, India has a great value in terms of size and conditions of ports. But from a naval strategic point of view, Sri Lanka by virtue of being an Island is in a better position to become the Malta of the Indian Ocean.⁶⁵ As Zalmay Khalizad points out, none of the other nations in the South Asian region can claim the importance Sri Lanka has in terms of geography. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and Afghanistan, all have their own geographic and strategic value, but from a naval strategic point of view Sri Lanka brings more advantages in terms of distances to strategic points in the littoral and protection of fleets and sea lanes.⁶⁶ Table 4 explains quality of the ports in Sri Lanka relative to the ports available in Pakistan and Bangladesh. These countries do not provide quick access to the Indian Ocean as well. However, Pakistani ports have the potential to dominate the Arabian Sea and Bangladeshi ports can provide access to the Bay of Bengal.

⁶⁵Hari Sud, “Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean,” http://www.ivartar.com/columns/OL_030523.htm (accessed 8 August 2009).

⁶⁶P. A. Ghosh, *Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Role of Indian peace Keeping Force* (New Delhi: A. P. H. Publishing Corporation, 1999), 47.

Table 4. Comparison of South Asian Ports		
Port	Max Draft (M)	Remark
Karachchi	11.9	Port Open
Muhammad Bin Qasim	11.5	Port Open
Chittagong	8.9	Port Open
Mongla	8.5	Port Open
Colombo	14	Port Open
Trincomalee	13	Port Open
Galle	9.1	Sub Port

Source: National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, World Port Index, http://pollux.nss.nima.mil/pubs/pubs_j_wpi_sections.html (accessed 3 September 2009).

It is the geographic location, climate and weather conditions in Sri Lanka that have attracted seafarers around the world for many centuries. That attraction is far greater in a world that is continuously challenged by a myriad of crises ranging from economic to international terrorism and energy security. As Kodikara points out, although Sri Lanka no longer plays a role as a base to any foreign power, its strategic location makes it a matter of much international concern.⁶⁷ Therefore, it is quite clear that geographic location of Sri Lanka has given it an enormous advantage to be the hub of all maritime activities in the region. As explained by Dupinder Singh, Ramesh Somasundaram and Robert D. Kaplan, Sri Lanka's geographic location is the best for a base to police the important commerce routes for the benefit of all nations.

⁶⁷ Shelton U. Kodikara, *South Asian security dilemmas in the Post-Cold war World in South Asia After the Cold War*, ed. Kanti P. Bajpai and Stephen P. Cohen (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), 48.

Security

The second criteria used for the analysis is security, which in the modern world could be considered as the most important factor influencing the establishment of a foreign base. Here, the importance of security is even more critical when we consider the security climate of the South Asian region. As illustrated by William L. Dowdy, the region is home to approximately two thirds of the world's population and has often been engulfed in conflict, political instability, and even wars between its two powerful states, India and Pakistan. The region is also home to the largest Muslim population in the world with India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Maldives accounting for one third of the world's total Muslim population.⁶⁸ According to G.P. Koirala, all the eight countries in the South Asian region (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan) have a multitude of internal problems in the form of terrorism and separatism coupled with intense international issues such as the Indo-Pakistan crisis over Kashmir.⁶⁹ It is also a region overwhelmed with complex religious, ethnic and political differences. Political instability, internal conflicts, religious extremism and hostility towards other nations are some of the underlying characteristics that have contributed to the deteriorating security situation of the countries in the region. Therefore, political stability, internal conflicts, religious extremism and hostility towards other

⁶⁸Bruce Vaughn, "Islam in South and South Asia" <http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:sGuYwfCjywMJ:fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/43999.pdf+Muslims+in+South+Asia&hl=en&gl=us&sig=AFQjCNHg2w7W81FPXSsbWDBjt6gQKmERSg> (accessed 17 September 2009).

⁶⁹G. P. Koirala, *Post cold War Security Issues of South Asia*, in *South Asia After the Cold War*, ed. Kanti P. Bajpai and Stephen P. Cohen (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), 3.

nations will be analyzed to determine the suitability of Sri Lanka as a location for a US naval base.

Political stability is the most important attribute of a modern state, In order to explain the phenomenon of political stability; there are a wide variety of variables that influence political stability in a country.⁷⁰ Some of the important ones are the rule of law, democracy and economic growth. All these factors affect the deterioration of political stability of a country according to Hans Klaus of the Knol institute. Sri Lanka as one of the oldest democracies in the modern world is a politically stable country.

According to the US state department reports, Sri Lanka is a multi-party democracy that has embraced democratic values and enjoys political stability to a considerable extent.⁷¹ However, the report was written during the period when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were carrying out terrorist activities to destabilize the country politically, economically and socially. Since the government declared victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in May, the government is making great strides in the political, economic and social aspects of the country.

The government enjoys the vote of an enormous majority of the people by winning all the elections conducted since 2004.⁷² According to Professor G.L Peiris the economy is also showing signs of tremendous improvement in the aftermath of the brutal

⁷⁰Hans Claus, “The Causes of Political Stability,” <http://knol.google.com/k/hans-klaus/political-stability/2zn8lkqpmcmpt/14#> (accessed 7 October 2009).

⁷¹US State Department, “Background Note-Sri Lanka July 2009,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5249.htm> (accessed 7 October 2009).

⁷²Ranga Sirilal, “Sri Lanka President Goes for Home Victory,” <http://alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/COL434148.htm> (accessed 8 October 2009).

war that ensued for 26 long years. Falling agricultural productivity, lack of income earning opportunities, diminished investor interest, unemployment and poor infrastructure are the consequences of the war between the government and the Tamil Tigers.⁷³ But with the end of the hostilities the government is pushing towards economic development by attracting investors from around the world by improving the standards of infrastructure and providing more employment opportunities. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka has declared that the country's reserves rose 71 percent in four months. This number indicates the prospects for the economy in the coming months. One area that is looking bleak as far as political stability is concerned is the rule of law. Both the United Nations (UN) human rights commission and Asian Human Rights Commission have expressed their concern over the deteriorating condition of lawlessness in the country. Forced disappearances, abductions and torture by law enforcement authorities have hampered the progress of the country.⁷⁴

The important point here is that if the rule of law becomes weak then the political stability of the country will be weakened. The economic growth and investor interest will also decrease in the case of deterioration of the conditions of rule of law. As Pinherio agrees, the lack in of the rule of law leads to lack of legitimacy and therefore will lead to

⁷³G. L. Peiris, "Sri Lanka has Achieved Political Stability," <http://www.lankanewspapers.com/news/2008/9/31991.html> (accessed 8 October 2009).

⁷⁴Lisa Schlein, "UN Human Rights Chief Calls for Sri Lanka War Probe," <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-05/2009-05-26-voa40.cfm?CFID=312543327&CFTOKEN=86535227&jsessionid=6630f5c49e23a189d6f7122924663b76692b> (accessed 9 October 2009).

political instability.⁷⁵ However, at present there is a lot of promise in the economy and people are encouraged to invest in trade and the government is also confident about the future. If political stability is maintained with the rule of law and a strong economy, Sri Lanka is sure to become the most secure location in the South Asian region. In comparison to other South Asian nations, Sri Lanka is more politically stable than all other countries with the exception of India. Political stability will also foster security among the people.

The second factor connected with security is the internal conflicts in nations. Sri Lanka faced a 26 year conflict until it was ended in May 2009. As pointed out by Miriam Young, like in any other internal conflict, the war in Sri Lanka was also responsible for killing and displacing thousands of people. It destabilised the economy, politics and undermined the respect for laws and international rules and, by and large, affected Sri Lanka's national interests.⁷⁶ As explained by Robert D. Kaplan the internal conflict in Sri Lanka prevented the US from seeking a military base in the country.⁷⁷ An enormous amount of national wealth that could have been used for development of infrastructure and education was spent on the war. But with the end of the war there are expectations that the economic, political and social status of the people will turn bright. However, there are still about 250,000 civilians displaced due to the war. The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka recently stated that the resettlement of these people and rehabilitation of the areas

⁷⁵Hans Claus, "The Causes of Political Stability," <http://knol.google.com/k/hans-klaus/political-stability/2zn8lkqpmcmpt/14#> (accessed 7 October 2009).

⁷⁶Miriam Young, "Sri Lanka's Long War," <http://www.fpif.org/briefs/vol5/v5n35srilanka.html> (accessed 9 October 2009).

⁷⁷Kaplan.

destroyed by the war is taking place at a rapid pace.⁷⁸ With the end of the conflict, the security situation of the country has improved dramatically and the Island is looking forward to taking advantage of its strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

The third factor of concern is religious extremism, which is a major problem in the broad context of international security. According to Thalif Deen of the UN, there is a significant rise in religious extremism in the South Asian region particularly in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁷⁹ As brought out in the preceding paragraphs, South Asia is home to the largest Muslim community in the world. As seen in the past, there are an increasing number of cases of Islamic religious extremism in the region. According to an Ethics and Public Policy Centre article, over the past two decades, countries of South Asia have witnessed the rise of dangerous forms of religious extremism. Hindu extremism in India, Islamic militancy and terrorism in Pakistan, the influence of radical Islam groups in Bangladesh and Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka have affected South Asian peace, democracy, and prosperity.⁸⁰ This is the single greatest reason that has made the region so fragile, apart from its other problems like the nuclear threat and poverty. However, compared to other nations in the region Sri Lanka is a moderate country in religious belief with 70 percent of the population being Buddhists.

⁷⁸ Asian Tribune, “Resettlement of IDP’s Taken Expeditiously,” <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2009/09/27/sri-lanka-pm-assures-resettlement-idps-undertaken-%E2%80%9Cexpeditiously> (accessed 10 October 2009).

⁷⁹ Thaleef Deen, “Religious Extremism on the Rise,” <http://chinese-school.netfirms.com/news-article-religious-extremism.html> (accessed 8 October 2009).

⁸⁰ Ethics and Public Policy Centre, “South Asian Studies and religious Nationalism,” <http://www.eppc.org/programs/southasian/about/programID.38/default.asp> (accessed 7 October 2009).

Religious extremism has never been a major issue in Sri Lanka. According to Chandra Muzzaffar, Sri Lanka as a country has a religious diversity that is second to none, and religious and cultural diversity has been the hallmark of Sri Lanka for centuries.⁸¹ It has created an atmosphere which allows an accommodative, inclusive attitude to flourish. Within such an atmosphere, it is difficult for religious extremism to dominate. The three major religious and cultural influences upon the people; Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam have all, in their own ways, contributed towards the strengthening of this atmosphere.⁸² Therefore, as illustrated in the preceding paragraph, in terms of religious extremism, Sri Lanka is an extremely secure place in the South Asian region.

Hostility towards other nations is the next factor analysed to find out the security situation in Sri Lanka. According to Kim Yon-So, of the Korean Times, hostility towards another nation is defined as being hostile to the people, government and the policies of that country. According to Charles S. Perera, Sri Lanka as a nation whose people are predominantly Buddhist has never practiced hostility towards other nations in furtherance of her goals. Also Sri Lanka is a liberal democracy and practices an open market economic system. There have never been Anti-American sentiments among the people of Sri Lanka, since the inception of US-Sri Lankan relations in the modern age.

Charles Perera, in his article on Anti-Americanism in Sri Lanka explains that there is no anti-Americanism in Sri Lanka other than a minor dislike for the US

⁸¹Chandra Muzzaffar, “Positioning Religious Extremism in South Asia,” <http://opinionasia1.com/PREISEA> (accessed 9 October 2009).

⁸²Ibid.

administration because of differences in opinion.⁸³ However outside Sri Lanka, in places like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, there are extremely hostile elements against America, its people and policies. According to Joseph Laconte, a recent poll taken in 25 countries have revealed that anti-Americanism is rampant around the world, with Islamic countries recording the highest percentages.⁸⁴ This anti-Americanism around the world certainly could be a precursor to hostile sentiments against the Americans in any country. As Saeed Shah, of the McClatchy newspaper reveals, anti-Americanism in Pakistan is leading to increasing hostility among the Pakistanis towards the Americans.⁸⁵ Anti US sentiments are also prevalent in India and Bangladesh due to the higher number of Islamic groups in these two countries. But, in contrast to other nations in the South Asian region, Sri Lanka's atmosphere looks the best for US presence.

Overall, as explained by the Prime Minister of India Dr Manmohan Singh on the 20th October, it is quite clear that the security situation of Sri Lanka is much better than the situations in most of the places in the South Asian region. The absence of extremist sentiments, internal conflicts and the growing political and economic stability are signs of increasing security and stability in the future.

⁸³ Charles S. Perera, "Anti Americanism in Sri Lanka," <http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2009/10/07/there-is-no-crude-anti-americanism-in-sri-lanka-the-some-time-coarse-vitriolic-is-show-of-anger-for-baseless-criticism-and-false-accusations/> (accessed 8 October 2009).

⁸⁴ Joseph Laconte, "Anti Americanism; Alive and Well in the Age of Obama," <http://www.american.com/archive/2009/september/anti-americanism-alive-and-well-in-the-age-of-obama> (accessed 8 October 2009).

⁸⁵ Saeed Shah, "Anti-Americanism Rises in Pakistan over US Motives," <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/255/story/74966.html> (accessed 8 October 2009).

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is one of the major factors in determining the economic development of a country. As explained by Harkarvy, in terms of establishing a naval base for the United States military, infrastructure is a major requirement for the movement and lodging of troops and personnel and for stocking of goods and equipment.⁸⁶ The availability of roads, railways, air fields, electricity, and telecommunication facilities in Sri Lanka will be analysed to find out how suitable Sri Lanka is for a naval base in terms of infrastructure and facilities.

The availability of air fields and ports would be the most important for the purpose of this analysis. According to Encyclopaedia of Nations, Sri Lanka has 13 Air Fields and four main ports in its possession.⁸⁷ However, there is only one international air port available in Sri Lanka. All other air fields are used by the Sri Lanka Air Force for operational purposes. Out of these the most important being the air fields in Trincomalee and Katunayake due to their proximity to the main ports. According to Harkarvy, the truly suitable ports for naval bases directs attention to a mix of variables which determine their worth.⁸⁸ These variables could be found in the World Port Index. According to the details published in the World Port Index, the details of the two important ports in Sri Lanka are shown in tables 5 and 6.

⁸⁶Harkarvy, *Bases Abroad*, 23.

⁸⁷Encyclopaedia of nations, “Sri Lanka; Infrastructure, Power and Communications,” <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/economies/Asia-and-the-Pacific/Sri-Lanka-INFRASTRUCTURE-POWER-AND-COMMUNICATIONS.html> (accessed 8 September 2009).

⁸⁸Ibid.

Table 5. Details of Colombo Port

Publication	173	Tugs Salvage		Lifts	
Chart	63233	Tugs Assist	Y	200 Tons +	
Harbor Size	M	Quarantine		50-200 Tons	Y
Harbor Type	CB	Pratique	Y	25-49 Tons	Y
Shelter Afforded	F	Deratt Cert	Y	0-24 Tons	Y
Tide	N	Communications		Longshore	Y
Swell	Y	Telephone	Y	Electrical	
Ice	N	Telegraph	Y	Steam	

Source: National Geospatial Agency, World Port Index, Publication 150, http://pollux.nss.nima.mil/pubs/pubs_j_wpi_sections.html (accessed 13 September 2009).

Table 6. Details of Trincomalee Port

Publication	173	Tugs Salvage		Lifts	
Chart	63233	Tugs Assist	Y	200 Tons +	
Harbor Size	M	Quarantine		50-200 Tons	
Harbor Type	CN	Pratique	Y	25-49 Tons	
Shelter Afforded	G	Deratt Cert	Y	0-24 Tons	Y
Tide	N	Communications		Longshore	Y
Swell	N	Telephone	Y	Electrical	N
Ice	N	Telegraph	Y	Steam	N

Source: National Geospatial Agency, World Port Index, Publication 150, http://pollux.nss.nima.mil/pubs/pubs_j_wpi_sections.html (accessed 13 September 2009).

As explained by Ramesh Somasundaram, these two ports have been used by the Royal Navy extensively during the Second World War and presently the Sri Lanka Navy maintains two of their major naval commands in these two ports.⁸⁹ As shown in the two tables the availability of infrastructure in the two ports are not sufficient to meet the requirements of a fully fledged naval base.

⁸⁹Balachandran.

Tied to the ports and air fields would be roads and rail ways. According to World Bank reports, Sri Lanka has a well developed transport system that includes a road network of approximately 100,000 kilometers (62,140 miles).⁹⁰ Roads are the backbone of the transport sector in the country. They are vital for the movement of people and goods and play an important role in integrating the country, facilitating economic growth, and ultimately reducing poverty. National roads carry over 70 percent of the traffic in Sri Lanka.⁹¹ However, uncontrolled roadside development as well as years of neglect and poor road maintenance has resulted in low travel speeds and poor service.

Although Sri Lanka enjoys a higher road density than in many developing countries, the conditions and standards of the roads are inadequate to meet rapidly growing freight and passenger traffic. More than 50 percent of the national roads have poor or very poor surface condition and many are seriously congested.⁹² Sri Lanka also has a rail network consisting of about 1,944 kilometers (1,208 miles) of tracks which links Colombo with the rest of the country.⁹³ However, rail transport facilities are limited to some of the major cities on the Island with poor maintenance being a major problem for the development of the system.

⁹⁰The World Bank, “Transport in South Asia-Sri Lanka,” <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSARREGTOPTRANSPORT/0,,contentMDK:20699037~menuPK:869140~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:579598,00.html> (accessed 9 October 2009).

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid

Availability of electricity would be another major concern in terms of operating tools and equipment in a naval base. Hydropower is the major source of electricity in Sri Lanka, accounting for 66 percent of the nation's electricity supply. Electricity is generated by harnessing the water flow of Sri Lanka's longest river in several stages. The remainder is generated through thermal power (34 percent) and most recently, wind power. Two coal power electricity plants are currently being built to cater for the increase in the consumption of electricity.

According to the CIA's World Fact-book, more than 65 percent of the population in the country makes use of electricity and all the major cities are provided with three phase electricity.⁹⁴ Sri Lanka has enough capacity in electricity to fulfill the requirements of a naval base in Colombo or Trincomalee since both of these cities are provided with an adequate supply of electricity. The following chart depicts the annual generation of electricity to meet the demands of the nation.

⁹⁴CIA-The World Fact Book, "Sri Lanka," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (accessed 8 October 2009).

Table 7. Electricity Production in Sri Lanka

Year	Electricity – production (Kwh)	Rank	Percent Change	Date of Information
2003	6,360,000,000	98		2001
2004	6,360,000,000	98	0.00 %	2001
2005	6,697,000,000	96	5.30 %	2002
2006	7,308,000,000	97	9.12 %	2003
2007	8,766,000,000	90	19.95 %	2005
2008	8,317,000,000	95	-5.12 %	2006 est.

Source: CIA World Factbook, Sri Lanka Electricity Production, http://www.indexmundi.com/sri_lanka/electricity_production.html (accessed 9 October 2009).

Telecommunications is the next infrastructural fact discussed in the analysis.

Telecommunications is one sector that Sri Lanka has vastly improved during the past few years. According to Telecommunication Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka the number of telephone users in the country has increased dramatically due to the government policy of opening the industry to the private sector. As of now there are mobile phone service providers including CDMA and GSM systems. They also provide unlimited internet facilities for consumers. Overall, the percentage of people using telephones are growing at a rapid pace which means the availability of communication facilities is increasing at an equally rapid pace. Due to the heavy public investment made in this sector during the last five years, Sri Lanka Telecom has expanded and modernized its service by replacing outdated switching systems and cable networks with modern and powerful digital switching systems.

As a result, the capacity of exchanges and the number of direct telephone lines have increased sharply and the quality of telephone service has substantially improved in the country.⁹⁵ Submarine cables extend from Sri Lanka to Indonesia and Djibouti. Currently there are two INTELSAT earth stations over Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean.⁹⁶ However, the communication facilities are surely not developed to the level that a US naval base should be using in other areas of the world. A large investment will have to be made to improve the standards of communication facilities, especially in Trincomalee.

Overall, the availability of infrastructure in Sri Lanka demands a great deal of improvement for the establishment of a US naval base. Furthermore, any attempt to establish a naval base will have to be supported by an investment of a lot of money for the construction of houses and other buildings necessary for sailors and soldiers.

Society

Although the presence of US military bases in many countries around the world has been considered as a security multiplier, there are issues that have affected the culture and religion of many non-Western countries. As illustrated by Anni P. Baker, the presence of US forces in Korea gives an excellent example of what could happen to a country's cultural and religious values. When a large number of troops are stationed without families in a non-conflict environment there is the potential for development of

⁹⁵“Information technology in Sri Lanka,” http://www1.american.edu/MOGIT/nm9903a/sl_tele.html (accessed 10 October 2009).

⁹⁶Ibid.

squalid camp towns.⁹⁷ She goes on to say how such environments helped to dehumanize the areas where the bases were established. Prostitution and a high rate of alcohol abuse and violence could become frequent in these areas.⁹⁸ This kind of an environment can certainly lead to tragic social problems and anti-base sentiments.

Sri Lankan society has a culture that is strongly influenced by Buddhism. It also has been influenced by colonialism by the Portuguese, Dutch and English. However since the majority of the people are living outside urban areas, the development of clubs and restaurants frequented by foreign soldiers and sailors would be a strange experience to the society. At the same time, the presence of such places and acts of prostitution and abuse of alcohol and violent fights will attract the resentment of clergy in the area who play an important role in the lives of the population in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the presence of a foreign power in the area could definitely be a source of out lash for religious and cultural activists.

On the other hand, the presence of a US base would enhance the economic potential of the locals in the vicinity of the base. Improvements in infrastructure and employment opportunities for the local population, growth of businesses and the improvement of living standards are some of the positive outcomes from the presence of foreign service members according to Katherine Moon.⁹⁹ Historically, the presence of a military base has always been lucrative to the host government due to the enormous

⁹⁷ Anni P. Baker, *American Soldiers Overseas: The Global Military Presence* (Praeger Publishers, 2004), 152.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid

amount of dollars that get poured into the bases and the wealth that is spent locally by the service personnel.¹⁰⁰ It is also a source of income for the tourist industry as many service personnel spend their vacations in various parts of the countries where they were stationed.

According to John Lindsay and Nick Morgan, the U.S. military has left behind a legacy of environmental problems throughout the world, giving rise to a multitude of complaints by host governments, community groups, and environmental organizations.¹⁰¹ As explained by Professor Katherine Lutz, the presence of military bases also will result in damage and destruction to the environment.¹⁰² This was evident in Korea, Okinawa and the Philippines. Dumping and discharging of radioactive material and waste, air and noise pollution, destruction of fauna and flora in the local vicinity of the bases has been some of the common problems that host nations had to face by having US military presence.¹⁰³ Sri Lanka is a nation with rich bio-diversity and would certainly have to face the same kind of pollution and destruction to its environment in the presence of a naval base.

The environmental, political, and economic impact of having a foreign naval base is enormous and communities pay the highest price due to their presence: farm land gets taken away to accommodate bases, Therefore, in terms of the social impacts, Sri Lanka

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 154.

¹⁰¹John Lindsay and Nick Morgan, “Overseas Military Bases and Environment,” <http://www.fpif.org/briefs/vol3/v3n15mil.html>, (accessed 10 October 2009).

¹⁰²Katherine Lutz, “US Bases and Empire-Looking at the Asia Pacific,” <http://www.dmzhawaii.org/?p=4272> (accessed 9 October.2009).

¹⁰³Ibid.

would have to sacrifice a great deal of its cultural, religious and environmental affinity in order to accommodate a US naval base. There would be great resistance from the local population for the presence of a foreign base especially because of the impacts that were discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

Geo-political relations

In the globalized world of the 21st century geo-political relations plays a crucial part in the relations between nations and their interests. As illustrated by Dale Walton, the characteristics of country's neighbors are of great importance and understanding the characteristics of a country's neighbors are an important role of the political hierarchy of any nation.¹⁰⁴

Different geographic neighbors have different issues, and their attitudes and thinking could change radically overtime. Geo-political relations of South Asia have been significantly changed in relation to the world political environment. According to Zhang Guihong, it could be seen through the balance of power in the cold war era, beyond the balance of power and after the end of cold war and a new balance of power after 11 September.¹⁰⁵ In this equation, Sri Lanka's relations with other countries have always been influenced by India.

Even today the geopolitical relations of Sri Lanka are largely influenced by the presence of India in the North of the country. According to the US Library of Congress, the two most important factors in Sri Lanka's foreign relations since her independence

¹⁰⁴Walton, 14.

¹⁰⁵Zhang Guihong, "US security policy towards South Asia," http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/sa/sa_apr03/sa_apr03guz01.html (accessed 8 October 2009).

have been a commitment in principle to nonalignment and the necessity of preserving satisfactory relations with India without sacrificing independence.¹⁰⁶

Sri Lanka's policy committed the country to a middle path of nonalignment to avoid entanglement in superpower rivalries. Some governments were generally friendlier to the West than those formed by the leftist parties. Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike deeply distrusted the western intentions and cultivated close and friendly relations with China in the early 1960s. But President Jayewardene gave Sri Lanka's foreign policy a decidedly Western orientation after he came to power in July 1977.¹⁰⁷ However, India began to show an interest in Sri Lanka ever since the departure of the British. According to RR Ramachandra Rao, India had very real interest in ensuring that no hostile power should establish itself in Sri Lanka. He went on to say that foreign airstrips and naval control of Trincomalee would unbearably expose the Indian peninsula to air and sea bombardment and assault along her extensive coasts.¹⁰⁸ Sri Lanka is within India's area of defense and at the very heart of its Indian Ocean defense. This interest remains unchanged even today.

Therefore, when considering the establishment of a US naval base in Sri Lanka, it is always important to find out the geopolitical relations of Sri Lanka with other nations. For the purpose of this analysis, Sri Lanka's relations with China, India and the United States will be taken into consideration. According to Zhang Guihong, the emergence of

¹⁰⁶US Library of Congress, "Country Studies-Sri Lanka," <http://countrystudies.us/sri-lanka/74.htm> (accessed 09 October 2009).

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Balachandran.

China and India as major global players is similar to the rise of Germany in the 19th century and US in the 20th century. This will inevitably transform the geopolitical landscape of the world.¹⁰⁹

China and Sri Lanka started friendly exchanges of visits since ancient times. The year 2007 marked the 50th anniversary of China-Sri Lanka diplomatic ties, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse visited China in late February in order to strengthen further bilateral ties. China, regards Sri Lanka as a good neighbor, friend and partner. As M. K Bhadrakumar points out China has been very active in supporting Sri Lanka in the final phase of the war with the Tamil Tigers. Chinese support came in the form of weapons and finances and China effectively used their veto power in support of Sri Lanka in the United Nations human rights council.¹¹⁰ China, along with Russia, also invited Sri Lanka to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a dialogue partner. China is also funding a port in Southern Sri Lanka close to the important maritime route in the Indian Ocean. All these developments are seen by India and the US as indications of the power of China.

According to Berlin L. Donald, China also has an ambition to control the Indian Ocean which is believed to be the most important Ocean in the 21st century.¹¹¹ Many also predict that China is planning to build a base in Sri Lanka. Although the interaction

¹⁰⁹Zhang Guihong.

¹¹⁰M. K. Bhadrakumar, “Sri Lanka Wards off Western Bullying,” http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/KE27Df01.html (accessed 7 August 2009).

¹¹¹Donald L. Berlin, “Neglected no Longer; Strategic Rivalry in the Indian Ocean,” http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/87417013_3.html (accessed 6 June 2009).

between Sri Lanka and China has been very active, it is interesting to see how China will react to the establishment of a US naval base in Sri Lanka. As G. S. Chowhan explains, a future US military base in Sri Lanka in the middle of the Indian Ocean could only be established with the consent of India and when in operation it will be a slap in the face of China.¹¹² However, China is a very important ally to Sri Lanka. China's relationship has been a long, cordial one that has benefitted Sri Lanka immensely. Close relationship with China would be highly beneficial to Sri Lanka in terms of geopolitics.

According to Wije Dias, India was deeply concerned at China's growing influence in what it regarded as its sphere of influence. External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee told the Indian parliament last October: "In our anxiety over the Sri Lankan war refugees, we should not forget the strategic importance of that island and it is not only their security, it is closely connected with our security, surely we would not like to have the playground of international players at our backyard."¹¹³ This statement explains the importance of Sri Lanka to India. Throughout the history of Sri Lanka, India has always been the closest and its most trusted partner. India has also ensured that Sri Lanka's policies are in line with the Indian policy, keeping in mind that Sri Lanka is a part of the Indian sphere of influence. During the period of the Cold War, India always feared that Sri Lanka would be a part of a western alliance against India because of India's support to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. According to Somasundaram, India was worried about the influx of foreign intelligence personnel into Sri Lanka and

¹¹² M. Chowhan, "Indo Lanka relationships," http://www.sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/12-12_Indo-Lanka.php?uid=2113 (accessed 24 May 2009).

¹¹³ Wije Dias, "Sri Lanka and India seek to patch up relations," <http://www.wsbs.org/articles/2009/jun2009/sril-j04.shtml> (accessed 8 October 2009).

the fate of the Trincomalee harbor.¹¹⁴ India felt that the US was using the communication facilities at the Voice of America station in the island to spy on India and communicate with US submarines in the region.¹¹⁵ According to him, the India-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987 and the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) were ostensibly meant to find a solution to the Tamil ethnic/separatist problem within a united Sri Lanka, but their real objective was to secure for India strategic control over Sri Lanka.¹¹⁶ India has always been the dominating force in the region and needs it to be considered as the hegemony in the South Asian region. As stated by Subhash Kapila, even in the final phase of Sri Lanka's war with the Tigers, India, although it did not help with arms and ammunition, provided moral and diplomatic support to ensure the defeat of the Tigers.¹¹⁷ By doing this India ensured that the government of Sri Lanka does not lean towards an outside power; specifically China for its needs. Sri Lankan policy is also increasingly leaning towards India, knowing that antagonizing the big brother would adversely affect the future development of Sri Lanka as a Unitary State.

When considering present developments, it could be said that Sri Lanka is heavily dependent on India's security sphere. Given the rise of India as a global power, and its ambition to become the regional power of the Indian Ocean, any military related activity with another country will have to be done in collaboration with India. Here the important

¹¹⁴Ramachandran.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Subhash Kapila, "Sri Lanka Strategically Important for India," <http://www.boloji.com/plainspeak/035.htm> (accessed 7 May 2009).

factor is the growing strategic relationship between India and the US. If India aspires to become the dominant power in the region, it could well be done with the help of the US because India is still far behind China economically, militarily and technologically. As Alan Kronstadt points out, the US can assist India to rise as a major power in the 21st century. Therefore, the US establishing a military base in Sri Lanka will have to be done in close cooperation between the US and India. On the other hand India too will be concerned about the ambitions of the US in Pakistan. The bottom line however is that without the concurrence of India the establishment of a military base in Sri Lanka would only be a reason for possible conflict in the region. Therefore, it is clearly seen that the policies of the Sri Lankan government when it comes to the security of the region is dictated by the influence of India.

Finally, the geopolitical relations between Sri Lanka and the US have to be analyzed to find out the possibilities of the establishing a military base in Sri Lanka. According to the US State Department report, the US enjoys cordial relations with Sri Lanka that are based on shared democratic traditions.¹¹⁸ U.S. policy toward Sri Lanka is characterized by respect for its independence, sovereignty, and moderate nonaligned foreign policy; support for the country's unity, territorial integrity, and democratic institutions; and encouragement of its social and economic development.¹¹⁹ Since independence the US has assisted Sri Lanka with a total of more than \$2.63 billion through the US Agency for International Development. It has contributed to Sri Lanka's

¹¹⁸ US State Department, "Background Note: Sri Lanka," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5249.htm> (accessed 9 October 2009).

¹¹⁹Ibid.

economic growth and development. During the 2004 tsunami, the US provided \$135 million in relief and reconstruction assistance. In addition, the International Broadcast Bureau of the US, formerly Voice of America, operates a radio transmitting station in Sri Lanka. The U.S. Armed Forces maintains a limited military-to-military relationship with the Sri Lanka defense establishment.¹²⁰

Though there are various accounts about the US being interested in the ports of Sri Lanka, nothing has been officially stated by the government of the US or the US embassy in Sri Lanka. As illustrated by a former US ambassador in Sri Lanka, Jefferey Lundstead, the US has no significant strategic interests in Sri Lanka compared to other South Asian nations.¹²¹ For the US, South Asian interests are only in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Furthermore, according to Ramtanu Maitra the relations between the two countries are comparatively fragile due to differences of opinion with regard to the Sri Lankan government's handling of the final phase of the war with the Tamil Tigers. However, the relations between the two countries in general have been very cordial. This relationship does not display any signs of a US interest in establishing a military base in Sri Lanka. As pointed out by Jeffrey Lundstead, the US will not strain her strategic relations with India by trying to get involved with a country under the Indian sphere of influence.¹²² For the US the most important partner in the region and in the

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Jefferey Lundstead, *The United States Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process 2002-2006* (Asia Foundation, 2007), 11.

¹²²Ibid.

whole of Indian Ocean region is India in terms of her long term interests. Again any involvement with Sri Lanka will possibly be done with the total concurrence of India.

Having analyzed the five factors derived for the analysis, it is suitable to answer the three secondary questions of the thesis. First, when we consider the question of strategic importance of controlling the Indian Ocean, one could summarize in Robert D. Kaplan's words that the Indian Ocean is becoming the centre stage of international challenges in the 21st century.¹²³ As explained by Donald L Berlin, after being in the strategic wilderness for more than a decade, the Indian Ocean is again becoming an arena of geopolitical rivalry among the littoral states and world powers.¹²⁴ The reasons for the Indian Ocean becoming the center stage are many. First, there is the question of economic interests of the nations of the littoral countries and the interests of the powerful nations whose economies are dependent on the resources of the littorals. Seventy percent of the oil and gas produced in the Persian Gulf region are transported to South East Asia and Europe through the Indian Ocean.

Every day thousands of tankers are moving through the Indian Ocean routes. Currently about 25 percent of all oil used by the United States passes through the Indian Ocean sea lanes and the United States also depends on the Indian Ocean for the shipment of about 50 different strategic materials, including tin, nickel, iron, lead, and copper.¹²⁵ Furthermore, 80 percent of the manufactured goods in the South East Asian nations are

¹²³Kaplan.

¹²⁴Berlin, "Neglected No Longer."

¹²⁵Ibid.

shipped to Europe through the Indian Ocean routes.¹²⁶ As a consequence, security and protection of these valuable resources have become an important issue in the region. As argued by Michael Klare the world is witnessing a growing competition over access to vital economic assets. Therefore, the US which is the dominant naval power in the Indian Ocean since World War II, will have to negotiate more crowded waters as the emerging economic superpowers compete for influence in the Indian Ocean.

Threats to international security are the second factor that places the Indian Ocean center stage of international challenges in the 21st century. Terrorism, piracy, human trafficking, drug trafficking and poaching are some of the major threats faced by nations in the seas of the Indian Ocean. Continuing nuclear and missile developments by India and Pakistan and Iran's ongoing attempts to develop nuclear weapons are key issues that are threatening the security of the region. In addition, a number of countries will be using nuclear armed submarines in the Indian Ocean.¹²⁷ International terrorism is also rampant in the countries adjoining the Indian Ocean. The economic and political environment in the African littoral, South Asia and Indonesian Islands has made it easier extremist groups to thrive in the Indian Ocean region.

This is further augmented by the fact that the Indian Ocean littoral is home to the world's greatest concentration of Muslims. This may not have been an important consideration a few years ago. But, given the struggle against terrorism, the Indian Ocean

¹²⁶Sandy Gordon, *Security and Security Building in the Indian Ocean Region*, (Australia: Strategic and Defense Studies Centre, 1996), 4-5.

¹²⁷Berlin, "Neglected No Longer."

will be the frontline line in containing the threats emanating from extremist groups.¹²⁸

The latest issue of widespread international concern is the issue of maritime piracy which has reached new heights and is seemingly out of control.¹²⁹ Also, pirate activities on the coasts of Somalia and Indonesia are threatening to reduce the world trade by increasing the petroleum prices. As the threats become seemingly out of control and threatening to destroy international trade, powerful nations are compelled to protect the vital sea communication lines that propel their economies as well as the world economy. This is where the third factor places the Indian Ocean at the centre stage of international challenges in the 21st century.

Today two of the largest consumers of energy are China and India. The rise of these two nations coupled with their aspirations to become influential nations in the region as well as in the world, is fueling a power rivalry in the Indian Ocean.¹³⁰ Navies of these two nations will inevitably police the waters of the Indian Ocean in the quest for economic security, fueling tensions and rivalry. The US Navy which is already the dominant power in the sea will also be engaged in protecting the sea lines of communications and the interests of its allies fueling further tensions in the Indian Ocean. For the US, the main interests would be to ensure the vital energy security and protection of its allies.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹“Piracy in the Indian Ocean,” <http://wmmbb.wordpress.com/2008/11/24/piracy-in-the-indian-ocean/> (accessed 22 August 2009).

¹³⁰Kaplan.

This is where the second secondary question has to be answered. What are the major interests of the US in the South Asian region? A close look at the current political map will show how important South Asia is to the US. As far as the fight against terrorism is concerned South Asia is the main focus of the US. Her deep involvement in Afghanistan in pursuit of the Taliban and Al-Qaida, her close connection with Pakistan in the fight against the extremist forces, and her strategic partnership with India says everything about US interests in the South Asian region. As pointed out by Donald L Berlin, India is the dominant power in the Indian Ocean. India considers Indian Ocean her backyard and deems that India function as the dominating power of the region which is named after India. A close relationship with India will guarantee the smooth access to the region in order to eradicate the menace threatening the world.

Then, as a matter of fact, the US is also concerned about the rise of China in the world stage and its influence in the South Asian region.¹³¹ In that respect the US is trying to build a counter weight in India to balance China which is gradually encroaching into the South Asian region making India nervous about her position in the region. According to Stephen P. Cohen, in the partnership with India, the US has a positive opportunity to make a long term difference in South Asia by addressing the important regional issues that are threatening world security. In this respect, a naval base in the center of the Indian Ocean to gain the strategic advantage would be something that the US would treasure in such a crucial time of the international political arena. According to Paul H. Kreisberg, with India it may be possible to for the US to work out bilateral access arrangements

¹³¹ Stephen P. Cohen, "South Asia and United States," Asia Foundation (2004) <http://www.brookings.edu/views/articles/cohens/20050101.pdf> (accessed 4 May 2009).

through, or in, India and elsewhere within the region in the future.¹³² As bilateral military cooperation grows, and mutual confidence increases, India might also be willing to support the US use of Trincomalee, provided Sri Lanka agrees and that the Tamil troubles have subsided.¹³³

This is where the importance of Sri Lanka as a strategically located Island comes into place. As discussed by P.K. Ramachandran, Sri Lanka's location is ideal to protect and control the strategic sea lines of communication running from the Persian Gulf to South East Asia. It is situated in the center of the Indian Ocean which would provide less time and distance for any naval power to move to the East and West. The British fleet stationed in Sri Lanka in the 19th century did exactly the same thing in order to maintain the supremacy in the Indian Ocean.

During the Cold War, both Super powers vied to make use of Sri Lanka's location to control the Indian Ocean. However, Indian pressure and the non aligned political stance of the government prevented the super powers from getting that vital advantage.¹³⁴ Realizing the importance of this strategic advantage, China is already progressing towards setting her foot in the Island by various economic and military means. Even though Sri Lanka's ports lack the required facilities for the functioning of a naval base it could be used as an effective base to control the entire Indian Ocean region.

¹³²Kreisburg, South Asia and the Indian Ocean, 4.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Kanti P. Bajpai and Stephen P. Cohen, *South Asia After the Cold War; International Perspectives* (Westview Press, 1983), 47.

When considering the US naval presence in the region, it is seen that the US Navy 5th Fleet is controlling parts of the Indian Ocean.¹³⁵ Literally it controls an expanse of 27 countries which includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal and the Strait of Bab al Mandeb at the southern tip of Yemen.¹³⁶ The 5th fleet also is comprised of three Combined Task Forces, its usual configuration includes a Carrier Strike Group, Amphibious Ready Group or Expeditionary Strike Group, and other ships and aircraft with approximately 25,000 people serving afloat and 3,000 support personnel ashore.¹³⁷ From a strategic point of view, Sri Lanka is the most ideal location to fulfill a plethora of tasks in furtherance of the security and interests of the US. It is a great location for a Combined Task Force which could also include Indian and Sri Lankan naval forces. Whether it is maritime security, nuclear proliferation, piracy, control of terrorism or even the mitigation of the spread of Chinese influence, Sri Lanka is most ideal location for a naval base.

¹³⁵ Commander, US Naval Forces Central Command, <http://www.cusnc.navy.mil/mission/mission.html>

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The research concludes that it is mutually advantageous for both Sri Lanka and the United States to establish a naval base in Sri Lanka. However, the degree of benefits varies significantly. The advantages that the US could gain by establishing a naval base in Sri Lanka is many fold. First, the US will have the luxury of controlling the Indian Ocean from a centralized location. From here the US will be able to easily support its operations in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf. The advantage here is the distance from Sri Lanka to these locations. Sri Lanka could also be used as a forward base in support of the Diego Garcia. Since Diego Garcia is thousands of miles away from the littorals of the Indian Ocean, a forward naval base could be established in Sri Lanka to police the Indian Ocean.

Secondly, it is the continued and growing importance of vital resources; oil and energy. Currently, the US is dependent on the Persian Gulf for its oil and energy requirements. The Persian Gulf is only accessible through the Indian Ocean routes. The US also imports material from countries like Indonesia and Bangladesh. Similarly other industrial states like China, Japan, and Korea consider the Indian Ocean shipping routes as important future energy sources. There is a growing competition for access to vital economic assets. Therefore, the protection of these vital resources could become a significant concern for the US. A naval base in Sri Lanka can help the US to effectively protect these vital resources and routes.

Third, the US will be able to strengthen its ties with India by establishing a naval base in Sri Lanka. As India evolves as the most important littoral power in the region its interests in the affairs of the Indian Ocean will increase. Similarly, China will be concerned about its key economic considerations in the Indian Ocean. China, which heavily depends on the Indian Ocean for its booming growth needs unhindered access to the seas. Therefore, China too will seek to establish a position that allows the protection of its sea lanes. China's increased presence in the Indian Ocean ahead of India is a matter of concern for the US. If the US is intending to contain China's expansion then it needs to support India. It can also strengthen its security posture in South Asia and the Indian Ocean by establishing a naval base in Sri Lanka. If China moves into the region and establishes its influence, then inevitably there is going to be some level of conflict between China and India which would create a very dangerous situation in terms of arms race and nuclear proliferation in the region.

Further, a naval base in Sri Lanka will be a very secure place for US naval assets as opposed to the Middle Eastern ports. For an example, the US 5th Fleet is presently deployed in Bahrain. With the increased proliferation of dangerous weapon systems and missiles in the Middle East and with the threat of potential nuclear states like Iran, Persian Gulf region is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to base such valuable assets. For the US to effectively control the Indian Ocean in the future it needs to have a secure base in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka could easily be this vital location.

For Sri Lanka the greatest advantage in establishing a US naval base on her shores would be the potential economic development. As discussed in the analysis, Sri Lanka

has always boasted of having one of the best natural harbors in the world in Trincomalee. But, since the departure of the British from Sri Lanka, successive governments have failed to make use of these ports to gain advantages in economic, political or geopolitical realms. No major improvements have been made to the infrastructure facilities to attract international traders or investors. Part of this is due to the security concerns of India and its influence on Sri Lankan political affairs; but the biggest problem that stood in the path of development of Sri Lanka was the conflict with the LTTE. For three decades Sri Lanka was not considered as a secure location for large scale investments. Thousands of ships sailing in the Indian Ocean bypassed Sri Lankan ports for better places like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia.

However, the present situation in Sri Lanka, in terms of security and its close relationship with India, could be considered a valuable opportunity for Sri Lanka to launch itself into the international arena. There has never been a period where the security situation and the Indian factor have both been positive for Sri Lanka. This situation could easily be turned into a very lucrative venture. India is rising and yearning to become a world power. Her biggest competitor in this endeavor is China. If India is to negate the Chinese influence, then it needs the support of the US. The deal between India and the US has already been established. Now, India's biggest concern is about the Chinese encroachment into its sphere of influence. Allowing the US to establish a naval base in Sri Lanka could bolster the chances of India's control in the Indian Ocean.

As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, she needs to understand the present geo political dimensions in the world. At the same time she needs to understand the importance of the western powers in a globalised world. Nations that have distanced themselves from the

west have remained in an economic wilderness throughout history. Even the most developed Asian nations like Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia have closely associated with the western nations in their path towards development. China's economy today is driven by the west. Therefore, the establishment of a US naval base in Sri Lanka would bring enormous benefits to Sri Lanka as a whole.

The improvements that will take place in the infrastructure and services sector, circulation of foreign currency and the expansion of businesses would bring about an enormous boost to the local economy. Security wise it will be a tremendous opportunity for Sri Lanka to draw the attention of international investors. The presence of US forces will certainly enhance the security situation in the country, which in turn will raise investor confidence. Such a situation will make Sri Lanka an economic hub, where it can attract thousands of ships passing through the Indian Ocean to its ports. As a tiny Island, Sri Lanka could become the Singapore of South Asia within a very short period of time. Sri Lanka also has an opportunity to explore into the 21st century by expanding its relations with western nations. A close relationship with the US could be the spring board for future success. Besides the economic gains Sri Lankan military forces will benefit from the presence of US forces. The Sri Lanka Navy will have an opportunity to expand its sphere of operations by working with the US Navy. Officers' and men of the Sri Lanka military forces will have access to advanced technology and training opportunities in the US and other western nations.

Apart from the positive aspects, there are two areas that would negatively affect Sri Lanka by the establishment of a US naval base. First is the realm of geopolitical relations. In that the most important factor for Sri Lanka in this whole endeavor is to

maintain good relations with India. Any decision in this regard will have to be taken in consultation with India because this is a decision that would affect the security of India. Without the consent of India it is very unlikely that Sri Lanka allows for such a base to be established on its shore. The next important factor is Sri Lanka's relationship with China. China has always been a friend that has helped Sri Lanka during its most challenging times. As discussed in the analysis China has pumped billions of dollars of aid for the development of various projects in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, there exists a strong diplomatic relationship between the two nations grounded in mutual respect. China fully understands the sensitive relationship between Sri Lanka and India. From a Sri Lankan point of view, the establishment of a US naval base in Sri Lanka is not meant to side line China in the Indian Ocean region or to antagonize them. Sri Lanka will continue to work with China on issues of national interest of both nations. Similarly Chinese interests in Sri Lanka are purely based on economics rather than military. China needs to ensure that their lines of communications in the Indian Ocean are secured to drive their economy. Therefore, China need not be alarmed over the establishment of a US naval base in Sri Lanka because Sri Lanka will most likely continue to support China's strategic regional goals.

The second drawback for Sri Lanka would be the social impact of hosting a foreign naval base. As discussed in the analysis, whenever military forces are deployed in a foreign land there will invariably be social crises that arise in the form of drugs, prostitution and environmental degradation, as well as legal issues pertaining to the punishment and extradition of foreign military personnel. However, these are insurmountable issues.

Finally, the thesis concludes that by establishing a naval base in Sri Lanka the US will be able to effectively control the Indian Ocean, enhancing its security posture in South Asia, an increasingly unstable area, while enhancing Sri Lanka's strategic economic posture in the region.

Recommendations

The research recommends that the government of Sri Lanka and the US explore the possibility of establishing a US naval base in Sri Lanka. It is also recommend that the US, China, and India engage in a dialogue about the establishment of a naval base in Sri Lanka in order to ensure that the strategic interests of all three of these nations are not hindered by such a decision.

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